

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

NO. 259.—THIRD SERIES. SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1893. PRICE TWOPENCE.

THROUGH THE RANKS.

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CHAPTER XVI. FOR AULD LANG SYNE.

WAS it sleep or stupor? The man's eyes were half-closed; the breath came short and jerky, with every now and then a low, gurgling sound; the hands were stretched out upon the blue hospital coverlet; the long, shapely limbs lay inert and helpless; but the dark head was no longer tossed from side to side upon the pillow, and on the pale lips lay the shadow of a smile.

A silver-grey patch of moonlit sky showed through the uncurtained window of the ward, the gas-jet was turned down low. There had been the faint ring of spurs along the flagged corridor, and now the Colonel, in scarlet mess-jacket and forage-cap, stood beside the bed. The orderly in attendance had the gas up in a trice, saluted, and passed out as the Hospital Sergeant passed in.

The Colonel looked down on the pitiful, prostrate figure, gave a sort of cough to be sure his voice was steady, and put the Sergeant to the question sharply—he always spoke sharply, though in reality as tender-hearted as a chicken where his men were concerned.

"Is there any chance for him, eh, Sergeant?"

The Scotchman passed his hand slowly over his moustache, lest a corner of his mouth should be seen to twitch.

"He's in a kind of a sleep, sir, now—a kind of a daze, as you may say—and it's

hard to say how he'll come out of it. Everything on this airth that can be done for him has been done."

"Of course, of course. But it's a bad business—a bad business."

"Yes, sir."

The Sergeant had been led into making one—for him—long speech; he wished for some repose before embarking on another, which loomed ahead and seemed unavoidable.

He was quite used to seeing the Colonel in his wards, for never a man of the Hundred and Ninety-Third lay a-dying but what the lank, wiry figure of the Chief appeared, sooner or later, at his bedside, asking questions in a sharp, short, parade voice, which everybody understood to be the outer manifestation of the truest and tenderest concern. It was told, indeed, how one man, delirious, as was supposed, catching sight—through what mists of gathering darkness who may say!—of his commanding officer standing there straight and tall, lifted his hand promptly in the old salute, and, in the very act, died; an end that had in it surely something soldierly and heroic!

But Sergeant Smith's case was no ordinary one, and if such things as nerves existed at all in the Hospital Sergeant's body, it may be supposed they had been a bit tried. At all events, his composure was not so absolute as usual, and he watched the Colonel's face with ill-concealed anxiety.

"When was Dr. Musters here last?" said the Colonel, who had apparently forgotten that the big gong in the barrack square had gone the hour for mess.

"Well, sir, he's been here off and on, as you may say, all day—and all night too, for the matter of that—but he was across

with Mrs. Masters, and Major Henneker, and Miss Drew, sir, an hour or better ago."

"Ah! just so."

It did not strike the Colonel that there was anything especially remarkable in the last-named lady coming to the hospital with Mrs. Masters and the Major. Miss Drew was a sort of person who stood by herself, and whose actions were not to be questioned as those of others. Of course she would come there, or anywhere else, if she thought she could do any good. In her, a perfect absence of self-consciousness bestowed an absolute freedom. If you thought of her, it was as you thought of a Sister of Charity in war time. She was a most useful person in a regiment, and a woman who never gossiped; a fact that, in the Colonel's mind, entitled her to be crowned a queen among her sex.

"Did he recognise any one at that time?"

"Yes, sir—and Miss Drew, she sang a hymn. It was beautiful—it really was, sir."

The Sergeant actually coloured up in his unwonted enthusiasm, and again passed his hand over his moustache.

"You think it soothed him, eh?"

"He went off, sir, just as you see him now—with a smile on him, and he'd been that restless before, that Orderly Simmons—one of the best men we have, you know, sir—was at his wit's end."

There is some reason to suppose the Sergeant was cracking a solemn kind of joke with himself, that his stolid mind was admitting a faint ray of humour, in the thought of all the strange things he knew, and all the strange things he could tell, and he would—but not even to the wife of his bosom had he revealed the marvellous strange doings of that afternoon. He had pondered over them heavily, it is true, and came to the conclusion that more would be heard of them; came also to the conclusion that such wonderful and disturbing developments had never come across the even tenor of his way before. His wonder what the Colonel would think if he knew all, gave an anxious wistfulness to his keen eye as he watched that august personage's face, bending over the unconscious figure on the bed. His notions of what was proper were utterly disorganised, like a company of raw recruits running this way and that; and yet there was a compelling sweetness about it all—a noble constraining personality about Alison, and all she said and did—that gave him a feeling as if he had been in kirk, and heard words of solemnity and beauty.

And now the Sergeant was going to take a rather hazardous step, but one that he thought right and needful. There were things that he felt, if they had to be done, were best done quickly. There was a grey look over the face upon the pillow that accentuated this idea in his mind.

He cleared his throat, passed his hand over his moustache, and from the breast-pocket of his tunic brought out a thin, folded slip of paper. Then, with a slight jerk of his thumb, he indicated the injured man.

"He told me to give you that, sir, when the worst came to the worst; and it seems to me the worst isn't far off. He said I was to say, would you please write, sir, and tell his father—that's his father, in there—and say, would he come and take a last look at his son, and forgive him for all the trouble he'd caused him?"

If the Scotch Sergeant's character for taciturnity was in danger after so long a speech, surely so was his character for implacable serenity under all circumstances, however trying, for sure it is that his voice faltered lamentably, and at last broke altogether. Even in that moment of emotion he gave a glance round to be sure that Orderly Simmons was out of ear-shot, for he was one with Sergeant Bagnet in a conviction that discipline must be maintained, and hospital authorities looked upon as beings of a superior and impassive race.

"The old story—the old story," said the Colonel, not without a certain grim satisfaction either, for he loved to think that the ranks offered not only an asylum but also a place of reformation to men who had got into trouble, as the phrase goes. Then he opened the paper, evidently awkwardly twisted together by faltering fingers, and as evidently held as sacred as the biggest seal could have made it by the man to whom it had been confided. He stepped under the gas-jet, turned it with an impatient gesture, and it flared upwards with a rush, sending a flood of light on to the writing on the paper—writing weak and unsteady, as if traced by a trembling hand, yet decipherable enough:

The Honble. and Rev. Hugh Claverdon,
The Rectory,
Forestreigh,
Devon.

The bare, whitewashed walls; the flaring gas-jet; the pale, extended figure on the bed; the stolid Sergeant, always more or less at 'tention when in the presence

of his commanding officer, and now staring glassily out of window, lest he should be supposed to have the faintest curiosity as to the contents of that scrap of paper—all these things faded from the Colonel's view. He was in Meads at Winchester, and far and near rose and filled the air the sweet, sad strains of

Domum ! Domum ! Dulce Domum !

that awan-song of a homeless boy, that has rung through all the passing of the years.

The Colonel is, in imagination, a boy again, and it is his last night at school. By his side stands his friend, Claverdon ; he, too, is about to leave the dear Alma Mater, and go forth into the world. As the sweet song of songs rises and falls, the hearts of the two youngsters are big within them ; their eyes are not innocent of tears. They link their arms one in the other, and so pass up and down Meads, those pleasant pastures lying all golden in the sunset. The Colonel comes back with a start to the present ; crumples the paper into the side pocket of his mess-jacket, and bends above the bed.

Heavens ! how like are the square, deep brow, the fine dark points of the hair over the temples, the smile that still lingers on the unconscious man's lips !

He passes his hand across his eyes. They had drifted apart, he and Hugh Claverdon ; but what man ever forgets his school friend—his "socius"—the one with whom all joys and sorrows, daring deeds, and boyish scrapes and troubles are shared ?

The Sergeant stands like an image carved in wood. The figure-head of a ship has as much expression in its face as he ; and yet he is conscious that the Colonel is strangely stirred.

Presently the Colonel spoke in his usual prompt fashion :

"Send an orderly over to the mess-room, and let Captain Lindsay know that I shall not dine to-night."

"What's up ?" said Ellerton—who had been swearing at having to wait for the Chief so long—as the message was sent in. But as no one knew what was "up," no one could enlighten him. He was not, however, incapable of surmise.

"I saw him go across to see that poor devil, Smith, a while ago."

"Just like the Chief, you know," said Blizzard, with a defiant stare.

"Perhaps so," replied the other, "but it's no reason he should keep us waiting all night for our dinner."

"Oh, hang the dinner!" said Blizzard, and Ensign Green said "Quite so," and focussed the Adjutant with his eyeglass.

Meanwhile, in the ward the other side of the Square, Colour-Sergeant number one company had opened his eyes wide, turned his face a little towards the light, and recognised his Colonel.

"It is very kind of you to come and see me, sir."

The man's voice was so changed, so feeble and husky, and came with such pitiful pantings, that the Colonel shuddered. His heart yearned towards the son of his old school friend.

When "the boy" spoke, how like, how like he was to the stripling who had looked so grand, as he faced the lightning deliveries of the crack Eton bowler without turning a hair ! Mark that the tall, moustached Colour-Sergeant has, in the Colonel's mind, become "the boy," since he knew that his name was Claverdon. But that "sir" hurt like a blow ; the red blood mounted to the Colonel's brow as he heard it. Take it altogether, it seems probable that, sitting on his chestnut charger at Alma amid a hail of bullets, he showed calmer than now, by the side of a man who lay in a hospital cot-bed, in a bare, whitewashed ward, where not a sound was heard save the echo of the sentry's measured footfall in the square below.

"I am very sorry to see you laid low like this," said the Colonel ; then looked round the bare room in a bewildered sort of way that struck the Hospital Sergeant as strange.

These were no fit surroundings for Hugh Claverdon's son—and yet what could he do ? The doctor had said that the one chance for the man's recovery—a slender, very slender chance at best—was absolute quiet. To move him then would be impossible. As to care and nursing, why, all of us who know anything at all of the hospital orderly, know that he is about the best nurse in the world ; strong—being a soldier—gentle as a woman, knowing neither fatigue nor loss of patience in the care of a case.

The Colour-Sergeant could scarcely be better placed than he was already, and, for the time being, silence was perhaps the best policy.

"Every one is very good to me, sir, but—I feel as if things were going very badly with me, and—there is an indulgence I want to ask for."

It was hard to catch each word as it

came pantingly from the pallid lips, but the Colonel stood close to the cot and bent low.

"Ask anything," he said, and really anybody might have thought there was a sob in his voice.

"I want to see—Private Deacon—I shall—die—easier—for having told him that I forgive him—it was a fault—committed in the heat of passion—I—forgive—him—from—my—heart."

A film seemed to gather over the eyes; the hands again moved restlessly upon the coverlet; but the lips still moved.

"She stood there—with the sunlight on her face—I heard her voice—her voice—how sweet it was—the angels sing so in heaven—" and then a smothered, pitiful cry rang through the room:

"Alison! Alison! bid me good-bye—good-bye—good-bye— Oh, my darling!—my darling!"

The Colonel fell back as if he had been struck; the Sergeant, with all his stolid ways, really could not have told you afterwards what he did; and but for Orderly Simmons, goodness knows what would have happened. But that admirable man, with a slight knock by way of tribute to the commanding officer's presence, came in, glass in hand, and, with a swift salute, stated in a most matter-of-fact way that it was "time;" by which pregnant syllable he meant that not even the Colonel of a regiment could be allowed to stand in the way of a sick man taking his cordial at the proper hour.

Noting the tenderness with which the man's head was raised and the glass held to his lips, the cunning of the touch that smoothed the pillow and laid fresh bags of ice upon the labouring chest, the Colonel felt that even Hugh Claverdon's son could hardly be in better hands, and, with a pale set look upon his face, turned to leave the ward.

Truly he had learnt some strange things during his short sojourn there.

The click of the spurs died away down the stone stair-way, and the Sergeant and Simmons were left looking at each other.

"Ain't he like a bloomin' cocoa-nut, now," said the latter, who was born and bred a cockney; "all 'ard shell outside, and 'is blessed 'art chock full o' the milk o' human kindness—ain't he jest?"

The Sergeant nodded. Really his exertions in the way of loquacity had been so immense during the last half-hour that the fount of words was dry.

As for Colour-Sergeant number one company, he had fallen again into a sleep, or a stupor, whichever it might be, and little flecks of sweat were beading on his temples.

"See them," said the experienced Simmons, looking down slantwise so as to catch the glister of the drops of moisture, "that's nater, that is, a-doin' of its best to 'elp the doctor; an' just you look at 'is chess, ain't it 'eaving more easy like? I tell you I've better 'opes of 'im to-night than I've 'ad yet, an' they've bin bloomin' little 'elpless kids of 'opes up to now, Sergeant."

The Sergeant bent over the figure, listened to the breathing that seemed steadier and smoother than before, and then nodded and smiled.

Meanwhile, with bent head and slow and thoughtful mien, the Colonel had betaken himself to Major Henneker's.

A long interview took place between the two comrades, for comrades in truth they were in the best acceptation and fullest meaning of the word, and the hunted, haggard misery that had rested on the Major's handsome face for the last hour or two passed, leaving him more like himself again.

Sorrow there might be before them all, but not such a scandal and nine days' wonder as he had feared.

He was at all times a man of few words, but the few that had passed his lips since he came back from that fateful visit to the hospital had been bitter ones. Not one of these, however, had been spoken to Alison. Her sorrow and her suffering had been held sacred; the solitude she had sought had been left inviolate; but the man's heart had bled within him, and his pride had been laid even with the dust.

One needs to know well one's soldier-world to realise the full bitterness of the blow under which he had suffered so keenly.

But the marvellous story was told. Clouds of doubt and fear were rolled away; there was much that was sad in Alison's love-story, but nothing incongruous. Telegrams were despatched, letters written, Mrs. Henneker and Elsie confided in, and—the Colonel quite forgot he had had no dinner!

How did Elsie take it?

She cried, "I said he was a Prince in disguise!" and incontinently waltzed round the table, light as a leaf before the wind; the while Verrinder, who of course was of the party, would have liked to cry "bravo!" if the Chief had not been present.

The waltz finished, Elsie had a word to say.

"She won't care—that!" and the white fingers gave a little flip. "She cared for him just as he was!"

"Oh dear!" said Mrs. Henneker, in her quiet voice and with tears in her eyes, "it is poor dear Mary over again. She would marry Captain Drew, and even when it turned out so badly, would never say she was sorry!"

"Still, that was a noble wilfulness," said the Colonel.

He was easily led to talk of the dear socius of the old school days; of a holiday spent with Lord Thurwold, the boy's father; of an accident at sports when Claverdon was hurt, and lay unconscious for a while, "with just such a look upon his boyish face as you may see upon that poor fellow's across there," added the Colonel; "the same growth of the hair upon the temples, the same line of the brow. Many a time have I been puzzled by something familiar to me in the Sergeant's face, and even his voice—and now I know what it was. Well, well, I shall see my old friend soon again. Heaven grant I may be able to meet him with words of hope and cheer. I should shrink from having to tell him—poor Claverdon!—that he had come too late. It is the old story, I doubt not—debts and difficulties, family estrangement—and then a man down on his luck, seeking to re-instate himself through the ranks. There's nothing like it—take the shilling, stick to your duty, show yourself a smart soldier, and there you are, you know."

The Chief was riding his hobby, and the rest listened in respectful attention, though Verrinder's solemnity was a trifle overdone, and after one glance at his face, Elsie dared not lift her eyes again.

They talked, as people will talk when some heavy, crushing anxiety is weighing upon them, eagerly, as a relief to thought, for the time was nearing when Dr. Musters had promised to come across from the hospital, and bring what news he could. No one, perhaps, was sorry when a white bird seemed to alight just opposite the Colonel, and flinging her golden hair out of her saucy eyes, look up at him with deepest admiration.

"Well, young lady," said the Colonel, and she, not one whit abashed, replied with a deep sigh:

"Things be very sad, sir, since they shot my officer Sergeant, an' I'm very

sad my own little self, too, for nobody won't be 'mused at all nicely; an' Alison's so sad, she's tiresome, an' apertly don't care for nothing. P'raps bimeby they'll be more 'museable, all of them."

"Let us hope so," said the Colonel, smoothing away a smile. "It's a long lane, little lady, that has no turning."

"Good Eliza is sad, too," said Missy, "because Mr. Drummer is fear—fully upset 'bout—"

"Missy," cried Elsie at this juncture, "don't worry the Colonel."

"Am I worrying you?" said the child, with a divine air of appeal; and then, catching a smile lurking under the big, tawny moustache, little Missy, with drooping eyes, engaging simper, and head on one side, made a suggestion: "Mr. Colonel, I want to be taken on your knee."

It would have been thought that Missy's family had long since got accustomed to her eccentricities; but this was an amount of audacity really beyond parallel, the Chief being known to be a reserved and by no means child-loving man; but in a moment she was "taken," her white dress and golden locks showing splendidly against the scarlet of the mess dress, and her demeanour that of a queen newly enthroned.

"He doesn't mind, you see—not one bit!" she cried gleefully to Elsie and Verrinder, in indiscreetly candid reply to their looks of disapproval. Then, with condescending politeness, she turned to her new-made friend: "Would you like me to tell you 'bout little Abadnego? He's just the dearest wee beastie—"

No doubt the conversation between these two strangely-assorted ones might have continued in flowing form, but at the sound of a step on the stairs all were on the alert, and, alas! Missy dethroned.

All waited in silence for the doctor to speak; but even before he uttered a word, the light in his kindly eyes spoke for him.

"I've some little hopes of him now, Colonel—his pulse is better, and he breathes more easily. If he pulls through, it 'ull be the most remarkable recovery on the face of the airth."

"I'm off for a grilled bone and a brandy-and-soda," said the Colonel; then, as a parting word, he added: "His father will be here shortly—he's one of my oldest friends—Rector of Forestleigh, in Devonshire. I won't say do your best for the poor fellow, Musters, for you'd do that for the last joined recruit, I know; but it

will be a load off my heart when you tell me he is through the wood. Good night!"

The ring of the spurs died away; the doctor sat down, took out his handkerchief, and wiped his brow.

"So that's it, is it?" he said at last. "And does Miss Alison know?"

"Not yet," they said, all in a breath.

"Well, I must go and tell Amelia. She's in an awful state, is Amelia."

And the doctor hurried off, after various particulars of the wonderful story had been duly imparted to him.

Elsie looked grave; so grave that Verrinder hurried to her side and took her hand.

"Mother, may I go up to Alison? May I tell her?"

Mrs. Henneker, who was crying quietly to herself over the really overpowering events in the midst of which she found herself, said a muffled "Yes, dear," and Major Henneker echoed the permission in calmer fashion.

"I think you are quite the best person to do so, Elsie dear," he said quietly; and Elsie went.

Nothing helps us so well to endure suffering as solitude. It is the great healer. It is like a mother's gentle hand upon an aching brow. It cannot drive the pain away, but it soothes it.

Alone, then, Alison had elected to bear her burden of sorrow. No eager questionings had probed the wound in her heart; in her misery she was held sacred to those about her. If they asked questions as to how this marvellous strange thing had come about, it was of each other. They knew it to be now inevitable; a thing that had to be faced; a thing subversive of all their traditions and ideas, a thing intolerable, and yet that had to be tolerated.

Naturally these feelings of deep dismay were now modified. The gulf was bridged over; they felt that Alison's instincts had been true; there was a rift in the cloud of their discontent.

"It is I, Elsie; will you let me in?" said that now excited and indeed tearful maiden, knocking at the closed door.

The key turned in the lock; Alison stood on the threshold.

Such an Alison! Looking, as Elsie said to Verrinder afterwards, as if she had gone half-way to heaven, and come back again.

Her eyes were homes of silent prayer.

She had been wrestling with heaven for

the life of the man she loved, as Jacob wrestled with the angel; and now the pale dawn of hope was come.

Elsie had meant to tell her tale so quietly—to be so calm, so self-possessed, so deliberate—and what she did do was to throw herself into Alison's arms, and sob out over and over again the words: "Oh, Alison, my darling; he may live—they say there is a chance for him . . ."

To tell the truth, after that gasping, wonderful, and glorious possibility, the rest of the tale fell somewhat flat. It exasperated Elsie to feel that this was so; but the fact was too glaring to be denied.

"Some day you may be Lady Thurwold," said she, shaking her cousin gently to and fro. "Alison, do you hear? Some day you may be Lady Thurwold."

"May I?"

The sweet, grave eyes, in whose depths shone a new and yearning hope, looked into Elsie's, past and beyond—very far beyond—the possible fact of such distinction as the girl spoke of.

The soul that has been closely communing with heaven finds it hard to drop to earth.

"Alison," cried Elsie, "I don't believe you care! I believe you would just as soon have found yourself with a mother-in-law who dropped her hat."

"I think I could have managed the hat, if she had loved him a great deal," said Alison, with a faint, sweet smile.

SHORT CHANGE.

TAKEN in the abstract, Justice must always occupy a leading place in the list of Christian virtues; indeed, when one considers how gigantic and crushing an evil its negation is, one is disposed to wonder why it has never made a fourth with our old friends Faith, Hope, and Charity. Yet I never look at the allegorical presentment of Justice, with the bandage over her eyes, without a suspicion that the original designer thereof was in his way a man of humour, and drew that friendly veil quite as much for the purpose of shielding from the eyes of the genius the many crimes that are daily committed in her name, as to keep from her the knowledge of facts which might sway her to give a decision on any ground save that of the most rigid abstract right.

If we were to find ourselves translated suddenly into a world in which exact

justice ruled supreme; where every man was absolutely sure of getting his rights to the limits of a hair, and at the same time impotent to impose on his neighbour for the value of a grain of sand, we should probably find the change as marked as if we were living in one of Mr. Gilbert's topsy-turvy worlds. For some reason or other man cannot stand absolute justice; she is too awfully perfect for his faulty, wobbling nature. He admires her in theory, writes books and makes speeches in her praise, and puts up her image in the temples which are supposed to be sacred to her; but she is too much of the marble maiden to compel the love of a creature of flesh and blood. Even to retain his toleration she has had to allow her fair proportions to be dimmed, and her symmetry to be disarranged; a fact which any one who cares may verify by comparing Justice with a big J, with the code which rules the every-day dealings of man with man.

There is no need to trot out the stock examples of this tendency, those well vituperated crimes which that hoary old sinner Society has wrought since men began to live together in fellowship. Over these men grow severely controversial, and there is a large class of readers which determines, and not unwisely, that it will have nothing to say to controversial articles; so let us take some well-known example from the common round to show how Justice sometimes halts, such as the amount of change we get every time we melt down a sovereign, not into half-crowns and shillings, but into some covenanted equivalent of goods, or accommodation, or service rendered. Let us consider the rate which is usually current in these negotiations, and the fate which waits for those who stickle for the uttermost farthing.

The man who hates being done, who doesn't care whether it's sixpence or twenty pounds, but resolves to take up the cudgels for the principle of the thing, is born with a fatal heritage. In another and a better universe, where political economy is an exact science, and where two and two always make four, he might manage to rub along; but in this helter-skelter, loosely-put-together world he will be conscious of a thorn in every cushion. He is a sincere lover of justice. He has not the slightest wish to encroach by a hair's breadth on any other man's rights, but he wants full and free enjoyment of his own. He is a man of blameless life and rigid probity, and yet

the first time that he shall make his protest and claim his full change, stung to madness by something which he considers a flagrant invasion of his rights, the odds are ten to one that he will find himself worsted all round; derided by his foes; and, what is ten times harder to bear, the object of amused contempt of those whose battle he has been fighting as well as his own. Mean-spirited fellows these, without the backbone to stand up for their rights, and willing to abjure them should the trouble of defending them call for the lightest exertion on their part.

I took a jaunt not long ago in the northern parts of this island, and I can safely say that the man who goes thither with the notion of getting his change in full has his work cut out for him. This region is known colloquially as the Land of Cakes; and, apropos of cakes, one may affirm that, within its bounds, the proverb that no one can eat his cake and have it, comes doubly true. I knew that country of old, and when I counted my sovereigns before starting, I determined to be satisfied with a modest equivalent of change—say seventeen and sixpence—for each. During my travels I met several people who were more exacting adherents to the theory of absolute justice for all, and the fate that overtook them in their crusade did not in the least encourage me to follow in their train.

The first instance I can call to mind is that of Mr. Carter. I made his acquaintance on the top of a Highland coach which I met at a lonely inn at the junction of two roads. There was only room for one passenger more when I climbed up, and this vacant seat happened to be beside Mr. Carter. As I settled myself he kept a jealous eye on me to see that I did not occupy one inch more of space than was my due, and proclaimed in a loud voice his opinion that four on a seat meant one too many. Alas, poor Carter! what a lesson was in store for thee, and with what bitter discipline wert thou to be instructed as to the carrying capacities of a Sutherlandshire coach!

We had shaken comfortably into our places, the weather was fine, the country through which we passed was lovely beyond words, and everybody was saying what a charming episode of travel a coach drive was, when suddenly the driver pulled up sharp and addressed some words in Gaelic to an old woman who was seated on the stone fence, with a large and not very

clean-looking bundle in her lap. The result of the colloquy was that the old woman, bundle and all, joined our party, and as ill-luck would have it, she scrambled, apparently by the driver's directions, into the division of the coach where Mr. Carter and I were sitting.

In a moment Mr. Carter's good humour vanished, and his brow grew black as thunder.

"What do you mean by this, driver?" he began. "There are four people on each side—the full number. If you don't put this old woman down at once I shall lodge a complaint against you. It is scandalous—most scandalous."

"Ye'll just sit there," said the driver in English, motioning with his whip to the narrow space between Mr. Carter and the outside rail, and completely ignoring that gentleman and his protest.

"But, driver, I insist——"

Here the objector's speech was cut short by the sudden onward movement of the coach, which consigned the old woman and her dirty bundle on to Mr. Carter's knees, while her hob-nailed boots played havoc with his corns. He raved and protested, but there he had to sit, more or less overwhelmed, for the best part of an hour. Then the coach stopped to change horses; and Mr. Carter, red-hot within and white without with rage, got down to lay before the landlord the story of his wrongs and to demand redress. But the landlord shook his head, and declared that he had nothing to do with the coach or with the number of people it might be made to carry. This speech may have been in the main true, but it could scarcely have been called the whole truth, seeing that the coach, as I afterwards found out, was horsed by his brother and driven by his nephew. Anyhow, he had no comfortable words for Mr. Carter, and when that gentleman, somewhat pacified by the departure of the bundle-bearing old woman, went to resume his seat, he found it occupied by two gigantic drovers. Then followed another scene of rage and protestation. The landlord stood impassive, and the driver, graciously breaking off a conversation with the new intruders, told him he must find a place amongst the luggage behind; people rode where they could on that coach.

Mr. Carter did not respond to this invitation. We left him standing in the middle of the road, and I learned afterwards, from a letter he wrote to the

"Scotsman," that he hired a carriage on to his destination, and sent the bill for the same to the coaching company. I wonder whether he has been recouped the outlay. After we parted with him, the driver and the two drovers talked and laughed boisterously together in Gaelic, and I am almost sure that poor Carter and his misadventures formed the subject of their discourse. This was an ill-starred day's travel for him, I greatly fear. Better had he been satisfied with short change for his sovereign in the matter of sitting space on that coach, than undertake the perilous contest he adventured.

Another example I may bring forward in the person of Mr. Blackstone, whom I met at the popular "Glenshinnock Hotel." He was a man who made himself agreeable all round. He knew all the nicest walks about the place; and, though he did not fish himself, he was full of information as to the right fly to use in order to entrap the trout which were said to exist in the loch near, the "fine trout and salmon-fishing" of the hotel advertisement. It was not until the close of our midday meal on Sunday that I noticed any sign in him of sinister humour. Miss Worts, a fussy, talkative spinster, who had already enlivened the place by getting up a "sale of work" for her pet missionary society, announced, just after the pudding came round, that to-day we should be favoured by an afternoon service in the drawing-room. Mr. Blackstone began to glare and fidget as he listened, and when Miss Worts had finished, demanded in a loud voice what a Roman Catholic or a Particular Baptist would do, supposing he might want to write a letter in the drawing-room while the proposed service should be going on. Nobody took his remarks seriously; but, as the sequel showed, he was in deadly earnest. A cursory glance at the guests round the table would scarcely have revealed the parson; but he was there, nevertheless—an over-worked curate who, knowing the ways of Miss Worts and her sisterhood, had left behind him all clerical garb, and put on severely lay attire. But not even this—and it included a red tie and knickerbockers—could throw off the scent a lady with such a keen nose after the clerical as Miss Worts. She was down upon him before he had been an hour in the house, and bullied or cajoled him into compliance. She made a hard fight to get a sermon out of him as well, but here the worm turned,

and Miss Worts had to lengthen out the service by throwing in an extra hymn.

Some minutes before the appointed time, Miss Worts entered the drawing-room to arrange the chairs conveniently for devotion, and there, seated at the writing-table in the midst, was Mr. Blackstone, with an air of uncompromising resolution apparent both in his countenance and in his attitude. Miss Worts coughed mildly; the clergyman, vested in an anomalous-looking black coat, appeared on the scene; and a whispered conference between the two took place, but Mr. Blackstone took no heed. Then some half-a-dozen worshippers, mostly ladies, dropped in and took their places with solemn smirking, and the clergyman passed over to the card-table, which was to do duty as a reading-desk; but Mr. Blackstone, like the lady in the poem, "neither spoke nor moved." The clergyman began the service, but before he had got to the end of the first sentence Mr. Blackstone was seized with some bronchial affection, and coughed as if he were struggling for breath. The attack wore itself out in lengthy clearing of the throat, and when he felt better, Mr. Blackstone began to write with a quill pen, which gave out such a diabolical scratching that it must have been prepared for the express purpose. The clergyman raised his voice, and at once Mr. Blackstone's throat needed clearing. Miss Worts lifted up a quavering treble in the hymn, and the quill pen discoursed shriller scratching than ever. The clergyman, after a brief struggle, recognised the incongruity of the situation, and rattled through the residue of the service as though he had been a college chaplain doing chapel on a winter morning. He consoled himself with a pipe on the hill, but poor Miss Worts retired to her bedroom to weep over the fiasco that had met her effort to make people spend Sunday as it should be spent.

So far Mr. Blackstone may seem to have triumphed in his fight for full change and for equal enjoyment, by persons of every religious denomination, of the public rooms of the hotel; but fate had not yet done with him. Miss Worts, on her journey south, met on board the steamer a lady as severely orthodox as herself, and imparted to her the story of her discomfort and the name of the instrument of evil who had wrought it, and who should this lady be but the sister-in-law of the Rector of the parish where Mr.

Blackstone lived! The story, by the time it had come to the Rector's ears, was considerably adorned, and when it was further handed on, to become the common property of the parish, it conveyed the impression that Mr. Blackstone, in spite of his attending church and even occasionally taking round the collecting bag, was nothing else than a blatant atheist. Seed of this sort, sown and judiciously nurtured in the social life of a country town, does not long lie unfruitful. Mr. Blackstone was soon conscious of the cold shoulder, and, having received a hint as to the reason, he tried to put himself right by attending service twice every Sunday, and by heading the subscription list for giving the Rector a new Turkey carpet for his study; but all he gained by this line of conduct was to acquire the superadded reputation of a hypocrite. The next year he failed to secure his re-election to the Town Council, and so missed the chance of rising to the dignity of Alderman and Mayor. His neighbour and enemy, Thompson, who would not have had the ghost of a chance against him but for these ill-starred rumours, stepped into his shoes, and, as luck would have it, filled the office of Mayor the year when an illustrious personage came down to open the new borough waterworks. He is now Sir Samuel Thompson, and many bitter things has poor Blackstone to say about the brand-new Thompson coat-of-arms.

One might go on quoting instances ad infinitum as to the impolicy of insisting on full change, but it is probable that the two already quoted will suffice to point the moral. This infirmity is as fertile a source of discomfort as the inability or disinclination to shut one's eyes to the laches and misdemeanours of the ministers of our domestic comfort, and it is surely one which ought to be checked without remorse. Ease, after all, is the goal for which most of us are contending, and ease will never be ours if we persist in kicking against the pricks in the interest of abstract justice. Our days of struggle and anticipation are the best we are likely to know on this side of the grave, and it is surely the worst economy to mar them by struggling pedantically after what no one else has ever attained. It takes a lot of greasing to make the wheels of life run smoothly, and, "experto crede," the acceptance of short change now and again is a better lubricant than the universal exaction of one's full rights.

"OCCUPATION—AUTHOR."

A COMPLETE STORY.

ON the whole I am fairly well satisfied with my banker. He pays me a half-penny per sovereign per month on my balance. I can withdraw all or any part of that balance at any time and almost anywhere. I can keep my account open by leaving in his hands the merely nominal sum of one shilling, and, even if poverty compels me to spend that shilling, he will re-enter my name on his books as soon as I get another. In spite of the liberality of his dealings he is not likely to suspend payment, because his name is John Bull, and he does business at the sign of the post-office. I have, however, one fault to find with him.

He is always wanting to know what I am. Not content with making me state my occupation when I go to him with that other shilling, he has to be reminded of it every time I draw upon him. Now, though I can't see that it matters to John Bull whether I am tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, or beggar-man, I shouldn't so much mind telling him if he would keep the information to himself. He is only an abstraction, but his young-lady clerks are personalities—very charming little personalities too, some of them—and when I take my book and my warrant into an office they show a personal interest in me, which, as a bashful man, I find trying.

I must confess that I suffer through my own foolish pride. Until lately, whenever I sent in a notice of withdrawal I filled in the space after "occupation" with the word "none," and as long as I did so I always received my money without feeling conscious that three or four pairs of bright eyes, all full of curiosity, dilated, perhaps, with a little admiration, were intently gazing upon me.

Unfortunately, about two years ago, when I was unduly elated over the acceptance of my first story—by the way, that is not quite accurate; it was not actually my first story, but the first about whose merits any editor agreed with me—I opened a new account and wrote myself down "author."

Then my troubles began. The first time I drew on that account, the pretty girl who compared my warrant with the facsimile from the head office, smiled and pretended she was obliged to ask another girl prettier than herself some question

about it. Then they both stared at me, not exactly rudely, but as if they had never seen an author before, and wanted to discover whether there were any outward signs by which the species might be recognised.

There may be men, possibly even authors, who would have found the situation tolerable, if not pleasant, but I felt as uncomfortable as if the scrutiny to which I was subjected had been the outcome of a suspicion that I had stolen a deposit-book and forged a notice of withdrawal, instead of being, as I believe it was, a proof of the interest taken in literature and the makers thereof by the fair scrutineers.

I might, of course, have saved myself from further annoyance of this kind by withdrawing my balance, taking it to some other office, and reverting to my former style of describing myself.

"But," thought I, "if you will climb the ladder of fame, my boy, you must expect the eyes of the public to be fixed on you. The higher you get the harder they will stare, so you had better learn to deport yourself gracefully under inspection before anybody publishes an illustrated interview with you."

At that time I thought that story would make me famous as soon as it was published—I know better now; I don't think any less of the story, but I found that not even the best work is appreciated as quickly as it ought to be—and so, fearing that I should not be able to get rid of my bashfulness through the medium of the post-office before I became a celebrity, I fled to hide my blushes in the country. I might as well have perched myself on the top of a lamp-post in the Strand.

I chose a very quiet place, too—Colstock, a little port on the Bristol Channel which plays at being a seaside resort during the summer months—but I am now convinced that I defeated my own object by seeking out such a retired spot. My secret would have been safer in Scarborough.

Of course the people in the post-office found out my profession the first time I drew on my account, and—mind, I make no accusations; I don't want to get the ladies who manage that post-office into trouble, because they are widows and fatherless; at least, the old lady is a widow and the girls are fatherless—three days afterwards the Vicar called upon me.

Now I am a bit of a Bohemian, and not used to paying or receiving ceremonious

calls. I pick up my friends casually, often in—well, in places of public resort—and sometimes I don't know their names until I happen to ask the landlord or the bar-maid. There now. I didn't mean to let that out, but never mind. The chief fault of most bits of autobiography is their obvious want of candour, and nobody can now lay that to the charge of this one.

After this confession perhaps I need scarcely add that few of my friends are clergymen, but nevertheless I got on pretty well with the Reverend Thomas Lowrie—so well that at last he asked me to come up and have tea with him the next day.

"And I dare say," said he as he was going away, "that you won't mind giving my little girl your opinion and advice. She dabbles a bit in literature herself."

When I saw the pile of manuscripts she brought out on the lawn for my inspection, I thought she must have swum in it for some years. Such pretty manuscripts they were, too, scented with lavender instead of tobacco, tied up with bits of pink silk ribbon, and written in a beautifully neat hand warranted to set the most respectable compositor swearing at large—only it turned out that as yet no compositor had ever seen that hand.

I almost cried when I discovered that every manuscript had half-a-dozen or more notices of rejection attached to it. One editor presented his compliments to Miss Lowrie, but was sorry that her story was not suited to the requirements of his two-penny-halfpenny—the twopenny-halfpenny is my own—magazine. Another thanked her for giving him the pleasure of perusing that same story, but regretted his inability to make use of it; and a third—he must have been a cynical, sarcastic sort of wretch, that third—led her to believe that unusual pressure on his space alone prevented him from accepting the poor, forlorn little tale.

I was—nay, am—accustomed to receive documents of the same sort myself, but I never treasured them up, or believed that they were meant to convey anything more consoling than an editorial opinion that my story was not up to much. That poor little girl, though, mistook politeness for appreciation.

"What do they say to people whose stories are really bad?" she asked.

"Oh! 'No rubbish can be shot here,' or something equally cutting," I replied with wonderful promptness, considering that until she asked that ingenuous question I

had no notion that she imagined that her stories had been awarded something at least equivalent to "highly commended" at a cattle show.

"It is very tantalising to have so many nearly accepted and never quite to succeed," she went on.

"It must be," said I with a sigh of sympathy. "But perseverance, you know, Miss Lowrie."

"Ah, yes," she said, with a deeper sigh. "But I have persevered so long, Mr. Dumble. Now you are not an editor, are you?"

I pleaded not guilty by shaking my head, smiling, and asking if she thought I looked like one.

"Then," she continued, looking pleadingly into my eyes and returning my smile, "your opinion, if you will be good enough to give it, will be based on the merits of my stories alone, won't it?"

"Certainly," I replied, with Spartan firmness.

"And you'll tell me really, honestly, what you think about them?"

"Really, honestly," I repeated, my voice shaking a little.

I didn't mean it. Spirit of criticism forgive me! I didn't mean it.

Edith Lowrie was one of the prettiest girls I have ever seen, and she used her eyes with all the innocent recklessness of a four-year-old child playing with a box of matches. She thanked me for my fallacious promise, and as she thanked me she "lacked me through and through" with the fire of those eyes, so that such poor sticks of honest resolution as were still standing when I made it went by the board immediately.

Dark brown eyes they were, and they had all that variety of expression which distinguishes the eyes of the natural flirt, but she wasn't a flirt any more than the aforesaid child with the matches is an incendiary. Of course she was quite safe with me. I mean there was no fear that I should misunderstand or take advantage of her simplicity, but as her senior by several years I thought it right to warn her that it might be misunderstood or taken advantage of by men less quick at reading character or less scrupulous than I am.

"Really, Miss Lowrie, you ought to wear coloured glasses," I said one day, when I had had tea at the Vicarage again, and we were sitting out in the garden under a tree.

"Oh, do you think so?" she replied. "I

don't find that writing hurts my eyes at all. They don't look weak, do they?"

She submitted them to my inspection as she spoke. I thought of Mrs. Wadman, contrasted the simple maiden with the designing widow, and nerved myself to feign the insensibility of Uncle Toby.

"Well, no," I replied, feeling that I was blushing, "not exactly weak, but you ought to be careful how you use them. You look at me sometimes as if——"

I came to a dead stop. She was at that moment looking at me as if she might be saying "wouldn't you like to kiss me?" but you can't tell a girl you haven't known much more than a week that her eyes say that—or at least I can't, being, as I have said, a bashful man.

"Well, as if what, Mr. Dumble?" she asked, changing all unwittingly her unspoken words to "Do you mean as if I loved you?"

Now, shy as I am, I flatter myself that if she had been the flirt she seemed I could have found something to say appropriate to the occasion, but, fearful of offending her, I stammered out:

"Oh! as if your eyes were tired," and then sought safety by fixing my own on the ground at her feet.

"Of beholding you, Mr. Dumble?" she asked, laughing merrily. "Now I call that fishing for a compliment, and as a punishment I condemn you to play another set immediately. If you were not so lazy you would have learnt to beat me long ago."

She was teaching me to play lawn-tennis, but I am stout and scant of breath, and she was as active as Atalanta. If we had played continuously to this day I could never have beaten her, even if I had tried; and I never did try.

We played our set, which she won by six to love, and then we talked again. A fortnight had elapsed since she gave me her manuscripts to decipher, and that evening she insisted on having my opinion about them. I need not set it down here. In the first place I do not profess to be a critic; and in the second my judgement, as I have hinted, was biased by personal considerations. She seemed pleased with what I said, however, and thanked me so eloquently with those glorious eyes that I went back to my lodgings that night more than half persuaded that I might not unreasonably hope to win her.

Until the small hours I sat up reviewing the situation, and calculating my chances

of success. At first I decided that my personal appearance would be altogether against me, but later on I modified that condemnation of my fleshly—I use the word advisedly—tabernacle. I don't pretend to be handsome, but I am not ugly—not repulsively ugly, anyhow—and as it seems to be the general opinion that, within certain wide limits, a woman's choice is not much influenced by the moulding of her wooer's features, I finally set down personal appearance as a neutral force not to be reckoned on either side.

My bashfulness I thought would tell rather in my favour. Even free-spoken, lively, up-to-date, London sort of girls have told me that they liked me because I never made myself too cheeky; and if such as these could appreciate the modesty of my nature, it was surely safe to assume that quiet, country-bred Miss Lowrie would like it.

Besides, though shy, I am by no means tongue-tied when I have a girl all to myself in a quiet place; and, though incapable of contributing my fair share to a general conversation, I can whisper soft nothings into a particular ear as well as anybody.

Then there was my profession. That was certain to help me with a girl who wrote herself; and I didn't think Mr. Lowrie could possibly object to it, because when he first called on me he said some very complimentary things about Colatock being honoured by my visit, and so on. In the end I decided that personally I had a very fair chance, especially as there didn't seem to be any rivals about.

Financially, I had a hundred and twenty pounds a year in Consols—enough, I thought, for necessities—and, on the strength of that accepted story, I hoped to be able to earn something for luxuries by my pen. There was nothing in the style of the Vicarage household to lead me to believe that Mr. Lowrie was a rich man, and I hoped he would not refuse to allow us to begin married life in lodgings in a Bohemian way.

I didn't think Edith would mind living in a Bohemian way, either. After I had decided that my chance was good enough to be worth trying, I sounded her on the point, and though her ideas of Bohemianism were derived from books, and therefore lacked precision in realistic detail, she seemed to have grasped the spirit of the thing. Anyhow, she was unconventional enough in her relations with me.

She took me for long walks. Yes; I mean that. She literally took me. I hate

walking, and if she had not insisted that I ought to see this, that, or the other pretty spot near—our ideas of nearness differed—Colstock, I should never have wandered farther than the Vicarage. By way of chivalrous revenge I took her on the water. Rowing on the Bristol Channel is not hard work if you time yourself properly—that is, take care to go up-channel on the last of the flood and come down with the ebb. You can, of course, with equal advantage, reverse the process, but at Colstock if you want to go out after half-ebb you must pay men to haul the boat and carry you over about half a mile of mud. This, however, is a digression. We never went out on the ebb. For one thing, it would have been too expensive—those Colstock boatmen put a value on their time, which is positively startling when you consider how much of it they waste in leaning against posts—and for another, the novel spectacle of boatmen working would have attracted all the village; but this is still a digression. Let me resume my tale of woe.

I lived on in my fool's paradise for about a month, fancying that I had made a favourable impression upon Miss Lowrie, and was deepening it as time went on. With the usual unselfish devotion of a lover I strove to please her by changing my habits. I dressed more carefully, smoked much less, ceased to frequent the village inn, and went regularly to church—her father's church. I even read some poetry and crammed up a lot of nonsense about sunsets out of a scenery-novel, so that I might treat her to the kind of talk she loved.

I had long ago discovered that our tastes in conversation differed. She liked to discuss improving subjects seriously, and, as I am accustomed to treat things in general in a spirit of light banter, our views sometimes clashed. It was a clashing of views which at last showed me on what unsubstantial foundations I had built my castle in the air.

We were out boating, and about two miles from land, just drifting quietly up-channel with the tide, when the crash came. We were talking about Modern Dramatic Art and the exponents thereof, and I—perhaps flippantly—suggested that there must be some truth in the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, because so many of the said exponents seemed to be nothing but up-to-date embodiments of the spirit of Mr. Vincent Crummies.

She did me the honour to smile, but quickly recovered herself and looked at me reproachfully.

"I wish you wouldn't turn everything into nonsense," she said severely.

"Will you help me to be more serious?" I asked.

"I—I don't quite understand you, Mr. Dumble," she faltered, blushing and looking down into the bottom of the boat.

I don't pretend that my eyes are very expressive, but I think that they must have told her what I meant. Nevertheless, I went on to explain myself clearly in words. She waited till I had finished, and then, as I leant forward to take her hand, she crushed me.

"Oh, Mr. Dumble," she said, "I am so sorry! I thought you knew I was engaged."

She looked sorry—I will say that for her—but why she thought I knew passes my comprehension. I suppose that as everybody in Colstock knows everything about everybody else, she took it for granted that my landlady or somebody had enlightened me. However, I didn't begin to consider that question just then; I was far too much upset by the unpleasantness of the situation to consider anything.

We were, as I have said, about two miles from land; the tide would not turn for another half-hour, and I am an indifferent oarsman. We were clearly doomed to remain in close proximity for some considerable time. Edith was steering; I was rowing. We were therefore face to face with our faces only a few feet apart, and I had just made an utter ass of myself. Nice situation, wasn't it, for a bashful man?

I blushed scarlet, seized the sculls and pulled with all the energy, if not the effect, of a 'Varsity eight rolled into one. I took it for granted that Miss Lowrie would steer for the port, but she never moved the rudder, and, as I didn't like to say anything, we simply went up-channel a little faster than we had been going before.

Presently my breath failed me, and I stopped rowing. Miss Lowrie, who had been steadfastly regarding her pretty boating-shoes ever since the catastrophe, looked up, and her eyes seemed full of trouble, almost of despair.

"Can you ever forgive me?" she asked, so piteously that I could have kicked myself for causing her so much distress.

I told her so in other words; that is, I assured her it was all my fault, and that it was I who ought to plead for forgiveness.

Then she brightened up wonderfully, and after a while I felt more comfortable myself. We weren't exactly merry, of course, it wasn't to be expected; but she was so sympathetic that I was no longer in a hurry to get back before our usual time.

With that childlike simplicity which was her greatest charm, she told me all about him: how he had been her father's curate, but now had a living of his own in the North; what a good fellow he was; how well he played cricket, and so on. I should be sure to like him, she said, and she hoped we might meet some day.

I am sure she meant it all—in fact, I don't believe she ever spoke an insincere word in her life—but all the time there was a sort of wistful regret in her eyes, as if she might have learned to care for me if her young affections had not been prematurely pledged. They were very tantalising, not to say provoking, were those eyes, and, though she knew it not, they tempted me to beg her to throw the other man over and elope with me.

My sense of honour, however, saved me from making an utter fool of myself, and I said but little for the greater part of the way.

"And when is the wedding to be, Miss Lowrie?" I asked, as we approached the landing-place.

"Oh, I—I hardly know yet. Perhaps never," she replied, with a smile, and a blush and a look which made me glad I had not asked such a dangerous question half a mile farther out.

Would you believe that she was nevertheless married within six weeks?

I had fled from Colstock and temptation the next morning, but I saw the announcement in "The Times," and to this day I don't know what to make of it. Paternal pressure must have been applied, I suppose, for I can't persuade myself that Edith really knew she was going to be married so soon when we parted in the Vicarage garden that night. If she did she was a most atrocious little flirt, and I must so totally lack the power of insight into character that I had better not occupy myself with authorship any longer. But then—no, I am certain she was not a flirt.

OUR COAL INDUSTRIES.

It is literally true that coal is one of the first necessities of civilised life. It is to the industrial organism what bread and

water are to the physical body, while to the physical body in cold and temperate climates its heat-radiating qualities are indispensable. So impossible is it for us as a nation to get along without this invaluable mineral, that it has long been contended by many persons that the coal resources of the country ought to be made and retained as national property. This is a question of political economy, which it is not our province or our purpose to discuss, but it is mentioned here as illustrating the illimitable interest of the subject. The labour troubles in the Midlands and in Scotland, and the so-called "coal famines" of the last two years, have given our coal industries a special prominence and a peculiar interest, and have rendered the time opportune for the focussing of information.

The first thing that strikes one who addresses himself to the study of the coal industry is its great age. Thus what is called the Great Northern Coal-field, which embraces the counties of Durham and Northumberland, and comprises an exposed and concealed area of six hundred and eighty-five square miles, and an area of about one hundred and ten square miles under the German Ocean, has workings at least ten centuries old. There is a record, dated 852, of the receipt of twelve cart-loads of fossil-coal at the Abbey of Peterborough; and this was, assuredly, not the first case of production and delivery.

The Deeds of the Bishopric of Durham contain records of grants of land to colliers as far back as 1180, in various parts of the county. In the year 1239 a charter was granted by Henry the Third to the freemen of Newcastle-on-Tyne to dig coal in the fields belonging to the Castle, and it was in or about this year that coal was first sent to London. Very early in the fourteenth century evidence abounds of a large consumption of coal by smiths, brewers, and others. Already the smoke-nuisance appeared, and a commission of Edward the First levied fines to prevent it. Another charter, or license, was granted to the freemen of Newcastle in Edward the Third's time to work coal within the town walls; and in the year 1367 coal began to be worked at Winlaton, in the neighbourhood where George Stephenson was to evolve the locomotive four hundred years later, while himself a worker at the coal-pits.

According to Herbert's "History of the Livery Companies," coal was certainly used

in the Royal household as far back as 1321. It is mentioned in charters granted by King John, Henry the Third, Edward the First, Edward the Third, and Richard the Second, showing that it had become a regular article of commerce. An encouragement to work coal was doubtless due to our insular position, and the difficulty and expense of importing fuel for the growing population.

A Government tax was laid upon coal in the year 1379, and this is the first mention of any impost. In 1421 a duty of twopences per chaldron had to be paid to the Crown on all coal sold to persons "not franchised in the port of Newcastle." This duty was allowed to fall into arrears; and, as it could not be paid up when called for by Elizabeth, a duty of one shilling per chaldron was imposed. This was the tax which Charles the Second afterwards settled on his natural son, the Duke of Richmond, and which, in 1799, the Government redeemed for an annuity of nineteen thousand pounds, and finally repealed in 1831, after it had been in operation for over four hundred years on the Tyne.

Another duty imposed by Elizabeth was a tax of five shillings per chaldron on coal sent over sea. This tax was increased by James the First to eight shillings and fourpence, with an addition of one shilling and sixpence per chaldron on coals exported in foreign ships. A grant was made to the Corporation of London after the Great Fire, of an impost of one shilling per chaldron—subsequently increased to three shillings—for the rebuilding of the City. Again, in 1670 a tax of two shillings per chaldron was granted by Parliament for the rebuilding of fifty-two parish churches, and in 1677 a special tax of three shillings per chaldron was imposed for the rebuilding of St. Paul's Cathedral. These duties remained in force during Queen Anne's time, and in the eighteenth century the imposts varied considerably. In 1850 the export duties on coal, of three shillings and fourpence per ton in British ships and six shillings and eightpence in foreign ships, were wholly repealed, and since then the remainder of the old imposts have disappeared. In 1831 the taxes on sea-borne coal yielded about eight hundred and thirty thousand pounds, and the export duty about one hundred and fifty thousand pounds per annum.

These facts are mentioned to show how important a function has been discharged by coal in the national finances, and in the up-building of the metropolis.

Surtees, the historian of Durham, dates the beginning of the rise of the great coal-port of Sunderland to the latter part of the reign of Elizabeth. According to Stow's "London," an institution was founded in London in 1430 for "poor impotent priests," who were to receive a certain allowance of bread, drink, and "coal." In 1521 almshouses were built near the Tower, with the condition that the poor should receive every year one load of thirty sacks of "chare coal." In 1562 the Earl of Warwick, as Governor of Newhaven, writes to the Council complaining of short supply of "wood and cole," and later writes expressing surprise that "we hear nothing of the Newcastle coles, for the which we have so often written."

In the Commonplace Book of Buckle, the historian, one finds some interesting jottings about the early use of coal. In 1572 to 1578 the price was eightpence a sack; in 1580, tenpence-halfpenny; in 1581, one shilling. Mention is made, in 1553, by the French Ambassador, of "charbon de terre," and "plomb," as two very old exports from England to France. In 1548 it is evident from a reference in the State Papers that the Queen-Dowager Catherine was in the habit of burning coal, and in 1560 the coal-miners at Newcastle were numerous enough to induce Lord Grey to suggest that they should be employed to spring a mine under Leith. A memorial drawn up by Cecil in 1563 contains an article prohibiting the carrying of Newcastle coals to the French.

Pepys's Diary records that in 1666, in consequence of the war, coals were three guineas a chaldron, and that a few months later they rose to four pounds. The earliest mention of the conveyance of coal in wagons along "wagon-ways," the precursor of the railway, is in 1671, at Teamstaith, in the county of Durham.

It is curious that the word "blackguard" came into the language just about the time when coals came into domestic use. In the sixteenth century colliers were far from popular, and in great houses the un-liveried menials employed to carry coals to the fires were called "black-guards." Putting two and two together, as it were, the word "blackguard" soon became a term of reproach. The reason why colliers were disliked was that coals were for long popularly supposed by the ignorant masses to be unwholesome. Thus a man who would carry coals was easily judged capable of any indignity. The "knavery of the

colliers" of Newcastle is referred to by Dekker—1607—and contemporary and earlier writers have also sneering or depreciative references.

A note by Buckle, to be used as a prelude to an account of manufactures in the sixteenth century, runs thus: "The two great physical causes of our prosperity are iron and coals, both of which we possess in such quantities that, with even moderate industry and skill, we could hardly fail to be the richest nation in Europe. But with the accession of Elizabeth we were entirely ignorant of the vast sources of power which nature had prepared for us in the bosom of the earth. Coals, indeed, had been burnt for some time, but never used in manufactures. Iron was only smelted by means of wood, but when that threatened to fail, the happy idea occurred of making one power aid another, and smelting iron by burning coal."

The author of the "History of Taxation and Taxes in England"—Mr. Dowell, an official of the Inland Revenue Department—traces a coasting trade in sea-coal to the latter part of the thirteenth century, and mentions the existence of sea-coal dealers at Colchester in 1295, who paid the then tax on moveables in respect of their stocks of coal. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, he says, sea-coal was used in London by "smiths, brewers, dyers, and others," as we have already mentioned, and he adds that the coal ships, or "colliers," discharged their cargoes at Sea-Coal Lane, where it was stored, put into sacks, measured by the quarter, and sold under the inspection of meters appointed by the Mayor.

The increase in domestic use of coal in London, however, was not rapid. The doctors proscribed it, because they considered the smoke unwholesome; Parliament petitioned Edward the First to prohibit this "novel and intolerable nuisance"; and, during the residence of the Queen in London, the use of it was totally suppressed by Royal proclamation, "In case it might prove pernicious to her health." It was in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, according to Dowell, that the use of coal began to grow from the forge into the kitchen and the hall of most towns that lie about the coast; and it was in the time of Charles the First that, notwithstanding its black smoke, sea-coal came into general use in the metropolis.

It is noticeable that although coal began to be heavily taxed after the Restoration,

the trade in it received some exceptional privileges. Thus, an exemption from impressment was granted to the masters of colliers in respect of one man for every fifty tons of the vessel; the collier ships were protected by a special Channel fleet; and nine men-of-war were to cruise constantly on the northern and western coasts for the preservation of the coal vessels.

These coal-carrying vessels, or "colliers," have played a very important part in our national development. For generations they formed the nursery of British seamen, and the "Geordies" of the coal-brigs sailing out of the Tyne and Wear used to be accounted among the nimblest and boldest seamen afloat. There was not, perhaps, much "book-learning" among them, and more of rule-of-thumb than of scientific navigation about the management of their vessels. But it used to be an old saying, which if not strictly true meant a great deal, that an old north-country collier skipper could find his way blindfolded from Tyne to Thames.

A splendid sight, which many living still remember, used to be witnessed at the mouth of the Tyne, after a long spell of easterly winds which had kept the colliers imprisoned in port, when two or three hundred vessels would spread their sails as they passed Tynemouth Point on their way to the ports of the South.

These old collier brigs were by no means so black as they were painted—at least, after they got away from the "staithes," or piers, at which the dusky contents of the pit-waggons were emptied into their yawning holds. They were trim and taut vessels for the most part, staunch and well found, as they needed to be to weather the winds and seas of the tempestuous German Ocean at all seasons of the year.

Rough indeed was the life of these old colliers, and rough the men and rough their fare who both worked the ships and discharged the cargoes; but the merchant service has never seen better seamen. Now, alas! the saucy brigs—the "Mary Anna," and "Two Sisters," and "Brotherly Loves," and "Johns and Marys"—are things of the past, while long, low, narrow, black screw-steamers throb incessantly up and down the coast in their place. Much of the romance of the coal trade has vanished with the old collier-brig—her rough-voiced skipper, and her burly owner, whose pride and joy it was to attend the periodical "club dinners" of the Mutual

Insurance Societies in which the ship-owners of the day used to "cover" their vessels.

The proper household coal used to be "Wallsend," and still is, although the name is now applied to much good house coal which never saw Wallsend. This celebrated name belonged originally and exclusively to the coal produced from the "High Main" seam of the coal-field of the North. The principal colliery at which it was produced was at Wallsend, a village about midway between Newcastle and Tynemouth; but it was also produced at other parts, such as Walker, Heaton, and Willington.

The same coal, or coal quite as good, was produced by many collieries in the county of Durham to the south, but the same trouble was not at first taken there to keep the good coal free from admixture with inferior qualities, and hence the reputation which Tyneside "Wallsend" coal obtained and long enjoyed. By-and-by, however, the Durham coal-owners began to work special seams specially for household purposes, and sent the coal thus selected into the market as "Wallsend." And as the original Tyne Wallsend seam became worked out, these other coals took its place, and "Wallsend" was used as a generic term applied to all Tyne and Durham house coal of the first quality. This, in fact, is the coal which used to be—more generally in the past than now—known in London as "sea-borne" coal, as distinguished from the coal brought in by rail from the Midlands and elsewhere. The great value of the sea-borne, or Wallsend house coal, consists in its great heating power, its steady combustion, and the small proportion of residual ash it leaves.

In the Northern Coal-field the best gas coal is produced from the same seam as the best house coal. Each ton of gas coal should yield, when distilled, not less than ten thousand five hundred cubic feet of gas.

The best steam coal of the Northern Coal-field is called "Hartley," much in the same way as the best house coal is called Wallsend. It came originally from a colliery near the village of Hartley; but as the same seam was discovered and worked elsewhere in Northumberland, the name "Hartley" was applied to Northumbrian steam coal generally. As Northumberland is now the chief producer of steam and some kinds of factory coal, so is Durham now the chief producer of house and gas

coal. Durham and Northumberland together produce more than one-fifth of the entire production of the United Kingdom.

The Yorkshire Coal-field has an area of about eight hundred square miles, if we include the portions which abut into Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. Sheffield is at about the centre of this coal-field, and Sheffield, as everybody knows, is the centre of the cutlery trade.

The seams are not as a whole so thick and rich as those of the Great Northern Coal-field, but those of what are known as the "Middle Coal Measures" of Yorkshire are both thick and excellent in the quality of the coal. Among the various qualities yielded by this field may be mentioned "Black Bed," a soft, friable, dull-looking coal, burning to a red ash, used locally for engine and gas purposes, but also sold in places as a second-class house coal; blocking coal, which corresponds with what is known as Silkstone further south; Barnsley, which exceeds in thickness of seam and richness any of the Yorkshire coal except "Silkstone," and is in two qualities, one adapted for steam and the other for house purposes; "Silkstone," a fine bituminous house coal, raised chiefly now for the London market, where it is held in high esteem.

The Cumberland Coal-field, like that of Durham, extends in part under the sea; but it is of comparatively small area. It is said that coal was worked at Whitehaven so long ago as 1660. The principal outlet for Cumberland coal, over and above what is consumed in local ironworks, factories, and so forth, is in Ireland.

The Lancashire Coal-field is irregular in shape and much broken up by "faults," but altogether covers an area of something like two hundred and twenty square miles. Here we meet with an altogether new set of names applied to the different qualities of coal, such as Balcarres, Blackley, Fulledge, Pemberton, and others. Generally speaking, the Lancashire coal burns freely and raises steam rapidly, and is thus excellent for factory and steamer purposes, but it gives off a good deal of smoke during combustion. In Lancashire is what is reputed the deepest pit in England—that of Ashton Moss, the sinkings and borings of which have penetrated to a depth of one thousand and fifty yards. The greater portion of the Lancashire output is consumed either locally or within this country, the exports being comparatively small.

The Cheshire Coal-field adjoins that of

Lancashire, and Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire we have already spoken of in connection with Yorkshire. The next coal-field, therefore, to be noted is that of Warwickshire, which in length is about fifteen or sixteen miles, and in breadth from one to two miles. The coal of this district is suitable both for household and factory purposes, and is distributed by railway and canal for home consumption.

The Shropshire Coal-field is irregular and much broken up, the principal areas being Coalbrookdale, Shrewsbury, Oswestry, and the Forest of Wyre. Most of the coal of this region is used for factory purposes and iron smelting.

The North Staffordshire Coal-field covers an area of about seventy-five square miles, is triangular in form, and rich in its yield. The greater portion of the output is consumed in the local ironworks, potteries, and other works; but a good deal is also sent away by canal and rail to different parts of the country.

The South Staffordshire and Worcestershire Coal-field is the most important in Central England, and, among others, it includes the well-known districts of Cannock Chase, Dudley, Wolverhampton, and Bilston. The production is very large, but probably three-fourths of the output are consumed locally, or within a limited radius of the pits.

The North Wales Coal-field yields both cannel (gas), steam, and house coal, and the South Wales Coal field is most famous for its steam coal. This field has an area of about one thousand square miles, and while it yields both house and factory coals, its richest yield is in coal suitable for consumption on steamers. It is preferred by the Admiralty to all other steam coals because, while developing heat rapidly, it gives off less smoke than any other coal. The export is enormous, and the growth of Cardiff, the great port of shipment, during the present generation has been phenomenal.

The Gloucestershire Coal-field includes the famous Forest of Dean, which yields a coal peculiarly adapted to the iron industries of the district as well as to household purposes.

The coal-fields of Scotland occupy, geologically speaking, a depression extending from the Firth of Clyde to the Firth of Forth, including the counties of Ayr, Renfrew, Linark, East and Mid-Lothian, Stirling, Clackmannan, and Fife. In length this coal-field is about one hundred miles,

and in average breadth about twenty-five miles, but it is not continuously productive. Still, it is the largest in Great Britain, although the output does not nearly equal that of the largest English coal-fields. Scotland produces both cannel coal—for gas purposes—and house, steam, and factory coals. The names of the various sorts are peculiar to Scotland, such as Ell, Main, Splint, and Parrot. Large quantities are exported from the ports on both east and west coasts, and during the English strikes large quantities of Scotch coal were sent by railway and sea to various parts of England—even by rail as far as London itself.

Ireland has not much coal. In the north there is coal about Antrim in Ulster, and about Leitrim in Connaught; and in the south, there is coal in the counties of Clare, Limerick, and Cork, as well as in Queen's County and Tipperary. The total production, however, is very trifling, and Ireland practically obtains all her coal for all purposes from England and Scotland.

We have avoided in this rapid survey all statistics referring to output, export, numbers of people employed, costs, wages, and the like, as these are matters hardly adapted to these pages and readily obtainable from official publications. In conclusion, however, we may state that the Royal Commission appointed to enquire into the subject reported in 1871 that the quantity of coal then unmined and available for future use was estimated at one hundred and forty-six thousand millions of tons. This is now being mined at the rate of about one hundred and eighty-five millions of tons per annum.

THE GREY BOY.

A SHORT SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER VII.

IN the meantime, the family party, as it assembled for dinner in the drawing-room downstairs, was scarcely in a more cheerful mood. The room, a magnificent one, was brilliantly lighted. The Ansons seemed to have a peculiar dislike to darkness. Mrs. Anson was exquisitely dressed as usual. But there was a sullen look, almost of suffering, in her face as she leant back in her chair near the fireplace, listlessly watching the flames flash and leap back from the diamonds on her hands.

Mr. Anson was carelessly playing with a young poodle—a pet of his daughter's

—which had ensconced itself on his knee, every animal that came near him invariably attaching itself to his person.

He was a fair man, with a good-humoured face, inclined to redness, as his handsome figure was too corpulent. He presented a strong contrast to his brother, whose frame, without an ounce of superfluous fat, might have been that of an athlete in constant training. Without any of the good looks of his brother, Hesketh Anson was a model of muscular and mental strength. His dark-complexioned face, too, with its harsh lines, was the exact opposite to the fair skin and finely-cut features of his brother.

He was absorbed in some notes in his pocket-book; and as he sat there, his face keen and poring with concentrated thought, ugly calculating lines deepened about his mouth and eyes, and made his face that of a man of whom few would venture to ask a favour.

He closed his note-book, the cold scheming abstraction of his eyes giving place to a more alert decision.

"We can't let Robson have Dale Farm at that figure," he said; "we must hold out for another hundred pounds for it."

"Lord! what a screw you are!" said his brother, with a half-lazy, half-contemptuous laugh. "You seem to have missed your vocation. You should have been in the rag-and-bone line. You would have made a handsome profit out of an old hat."

Hesketh Anson made no remark. He scarcely even noticed the taunt. The calculating abstraction still shadowed his eyes.

"No. I'll try and get over to McGeorge's to-morrow, and tell him that we'll see his friend about the matter. He is dead on having the farm, I believe, and will give us our price if we hold out. Robson can't."

His brother shrugged his shoulders, and there was a second's silence. Then a thought roused him for a moment out of his indolent indifference.

"Old Robson will be awfully cut up," he said. "He has set his heart on his nephew having Dale Farm—and you know—I half promised it to him that afternoon in Weybourne."

"I wish to goodness, Jim, you would leave me to manage matters," said Hesketh Anson, with a savage note of impatience in his voice. "You are always putting in your oar and spoiling things. Either I manage these business affairs or you do!"

Jim Anson made a gesture of careless

resignation and turned away from his brother.

"What is Dolores doing that she isn't downstairs yet?" he asked of his wife, something enlightening the ignoble indifference of his face as he mentioned his child's name.

"She's not coming down to-night at all!" said his wife shortly, rousing herself from her listlessness, and giving him an account of what had taken place.

"The deuce!" said Mr. James Anson when she had finished. "Who could have thought that that prim little white-faced bit would have had it in her?"

It must be confessed that Mr. James Anson had been considerably disappointed in the appearance of Miss Mallet, which in no ways tallied with the enthusiastic description Dolores had given him of her.

"I think it was very hard on the poor child," said Mrs. Anson, darting an angry look at her brother-in-law, "and very presuming on Miss Mallet's part to insist on punishing her in that way. I shouldn't have allowed it, only Hesketh made me."

"Is Hesketh ranging himself on the side of school-room morals and propriety?" asked Jim Anson, with a lazy laugh. "I could have understood it better if the guardian angel had appeared in a little more alluring shape. I felt like a bad boy in school as she sat looking at me over the teapot with that slow, severe gaze. Rather pretty eyes, too—if they didn't freeze you."

"If you mean to try and keep her here, Dolores will have to behave better," said Hesketh Anson.

"What's the good?" exclaimed Mrs. Anson, the ill-humour in her beautiful face changing into bitterness. "As soon as the snow melts, and she can get out, they will all be at her, and there will be more scenes and impertinences—and then she will be off, like the rest of the hateful, spiteful, gossiping creatures—"

A look of intense pity softened for an instant her husband's eyes, but it vanished in cynical laughter.

"It's rough on Hex," he said. "I really think it isn't fair to let him face all the outraged proprieties. 'Pon my word, though, I think I'd rather interview the raging specimens of shocked good ladies than face the severity of that girl upstairs. A chap would have a bad quarter of an hour with her if she cut up rough!"

There was a rather grim look in Hesketh Anson's eyes, as if he were quite aware of that fact.

Washington appeared at that moment to announce with pompous solemnity that dinner was served.

But the gloom that had touched the three as they sat together in the drawing-room followed them into the dining-room. The meal was a very silent one. Though neither of the men commented on the fact, they both missed keenly the bright, chattering presence of the child, who—spoilt, wilful, selfishly indulged as she was—was still the ray of sunshine in that great, shadow-haunted home. The thought of her suffering made them feel her absence still more. Mrs. Anson's thoughts were absorbed in herself.

As the dinner came to an end, the fire that had been burning in her heart blazed up. She stopped as she reached the door, which Hesketh Anson held open for her, and turned back to look at her husband seated at the oval flower-decked table, with its blaze of candles and glitter of silver.

"It is beyond endurance!" she exclaimed, pale with passion, all the fire in her nature ablaze in her eyes. "I will not stand it any longer; I shall go mad! Let me go away, Jim—to the farthest corner of the earth, if I must! But let me go. If you will not come, let Dolores and me go alone. You and Hex are killing me—and you both know it. I hate him—and if you keep me here any longer, I shall hate you too. Let me go."

"Missie Anson—good Lord—Missie Anson!" whispered an anxious voice in the hall behind her, and Washington, who was just returning to the dining-room with a bottle of old wine for which his master had sent him, made a warning gesture to the drawing-room opposite, out of which at that instant the bold-faced housemaid happened to be coming.

With a furious look at him, Mrs. Anson turned and swept out of the dining-room.

The housemaid, who might or might not have heard her, was leisurely disappearing into the back of the hall.

Mrs. Anson, perfectly indifferent, for the moment, to her existence, went straight up to her room. There was a second's strained pause in the dining-room, and then Hesketh Anson turned back to the dinner-table. His brother sat there, a strange, crushed look on his face.

"Good Lord!" he said, in a hoarse voice. "She's right."

Hesketh Anson did not answer; but he poured himself out a big bumper of the wine before him.

Washington, with an almost ludicrous affectation of ignoring what had passed on his face, came up with pompous officiousness with the fresh bottle of wine.

"Curse you!" said his master savagely. "What do you bring me that mawkish stuff for? Bring me the brandy."

Washington, a greyish pallor tinging his ebony face, hesitated, glancing appealingly at Hesketh Anson.

"You don't want brandy," said the latter curtly.

But his brother turned on him savagely.

"Curse you!" he said furiously. "Let me alone. Don't you boss the show enough as it is? I can't even call my soul my own. You've got everything else in your own hands. Just let me go to the devil in my own way."

CHAPTER VIII.

LEILA, in the darkness of her own room, cried herself to sleep that night as any forlorn little school-girl might have done. Her wounded arm throbbed and ached. No one troubled to attend to it for her. But no thought of deserting her post, and so depriving the beloved invalid in that distant Cornish village of the necessities that post would provide, entered her head. Even her prayers scarcely seemed to bring her the counsel and consolation which they usually did. But they must have comforted her more than she knew, for she fell, after a time, into a deep and restful sleep, out of which she was suddenly startled, as she had been that first night she had slept there.

Ever since that night she had felt a great disinclination to sleep in the dark. But she had been ashamed to ask Martha for the night-lights, which the woman had herself the first day urged on her with an almost tiresome persistence. She always made up her fire into a bright blaze before getting into bed, and besides that, in spite of cold and boisterous winds, opened the shutters and drew up the blinds, that any moonlight there should be, as well as the first rays of dawn, could fall into her room. Her fancies and fears were so vague that she could scarcely define them herself. But it almost seemed as if the liking the Ansons showed for light had affected her too. The moonlight to-night was falling full into her room through the small-paned windows which, with the high wainscotings, and heavy oak beams, and the old furniture left untouched still in many of the rooms, recalled always, in

spite of Mrs. Anson's efforts, the fashion of a day that had long passed away.

It fell in a stream of cold white light, chequered by the shadows of the lattice-work across the floor, reaching to the bedside. In its ghostly radiance, bare-footed, stood a shadowy, white-clad figure, calling to her with the sorrowful cry that had roused her out of her sleep:

"Miss Mallet! Miss Mallet!"

As Leila started up on her pillows the slender figure scrambled up on the bed beside her, flinging loving arms round her, pressing a wet, burning cheek to hers.

"Miss Mallet! Please forgive me! I haven't been able to sleep! Oh! don't go away, but stay, please, and teach me how to be good! I am so sorry!"

A tender arm closed round the little penitent, and for a moment the sobbing child and the girl, with her lovely tear-dimmed eyes, clung close together.

"You won't go away?—though Uncle Hex says you will. He wants you to do so, I know! And I love you so!"

"I won't go away, I promise you! No one shall make me leave you!" said Leila, with a passionate defiance of Hesketh Anson.

The child nestled closer into the warm, protecting arms of her new friend, who, alarmed for the result of that midnight journey through the cold house, tried to warm the icy feet and hands.

"You shouldn't have come, darling, like this, without any wrap—all this way, too, through the cold passages." Dolores slept in a room opening off her mother's. Then a sudden thought came to her, turning her as cold as the child herself. In the excitement of the moment she had overlooked the strange fact.

"But how did you get into my room?" she exclaimed involuntarily. "The door was locked!" She had, as she had done every night on entering her bedroom, fastened it, and made sure that it was secure. It had been fastened on the inside. How could the child have opened it from the outside?

"It wasn't locked when I came!" said Dolores, already growing drowsy with returning warmth and the peaceful rest of a soul forgiven. She was exhausted mentally and physically with the strength of her emotions. "Perhaps the Grey Boy unlocked it!" dreamily. "He does sometimes, and if the rooms are dark, he—comes—in—good night—kiss me."

Leila bent and kissed the child, whose

sleepy voice broke off with a contented sigh, and in a few moments she was asleep.

Leila lay down beside her, but she did not sleep. She lay there, her eyes fixed on the door, which stood ajar as Dolores had left it. And as she watched it, faintly defined in the moonlit shadow, all sorts of weird and horrible fancies haunted her over-excited imagination. Sometimes the narrow opening, with the blackness of the room beyond as a background in which unknown perils might be lurking, seemed to be stealthily widening; sometimes long white fingers seemed to creep round the edge.

Once she fancied, as sleep began at last to dim her aching eyes, that she saw a grey shadowy figure stealing forward from the darkness towards that stream of light as it fell, cold and white from a dead world, across her chamber floor. But as it reached the brink of that unearthly radiant stream, the figure faded into nothingness, as if its mysterious light lay an impassable barrier between it and its human prey.

CHAPTER IX.

CHRISTMAS DAY fell on a Sunday.

Leila had been at Moorlands for three weeks. The bad weather and snow-blocked lanes had made it almost impossible as yet for any one to walk as far as the church, a distance of about a mile and a half.

Till now, Leila had scarcely been outside the gates. She found that the Ansons themselves never went to church, while Christmas Day came and went entirely unnoticed. It was evident that any attempt of her own to attend service would be strongly if silently opposed.

But she had determined that, at the cost of any fatigue and difficulty, she would go to church on Christmas morning. An unpleasant incident occurred on Christmas Eve.

On going to bed she found a note on her dressing-table. Considerably surprised, she opened it. It began abruptly, and was unsigned. But the recollection that the bold-faced housemaid had been summarily dismissed the house that day gave a clue to the writer. At first she was inclined not to read it. The girl, whose manner and appearance she disliked intensely, could have nothing to say to her, and an anonymous communication was always cowardly and despicable. Then a name caught her eye, and a wave of pleasant recollection swept over her. She seemed to feel once more the firm pressure of the friendly hand, to hear

the kindly-spoken offer of assistance; for if his words had not actually formulated the promise, Dr. Burton's eyes and tone had assured her of his warm interest. She had not seen him since. What could the girl have to do with him? And curiosity, which was not all idle, prevailed over principle, to meet its own punishment. As she laid down the letter, she wished with all her heart that she had not read it.

It was badly written and badly spelt, breathing malice and insolence in every word. For all its bravado, the writer was plainly furious at her own dismissal.

"If you will excuse me taking the liberty, you will follow a friend's advice and get out of this wicked house as soon as you can. The writer of this would have warned you before, if you hadn't thought it was beneath your notice to look at poor servant-girls, who is honest and respectable if they aren't black, whose wickedness isn't to be talked of. And it isn't only a poor servant who warns you. Dr. Burton would say the same. Ask him. And of all the wickedest women Mrs. Anson is the wickedest, though she does dress up so finely, and everybody will tell you. Not a Christian soul ever comes near this house, and no servants—except those low black things—or governesses stay. They lose their character at once, and nothing would have made me demean myself to come, if that hateful bad woman Martha hadn't almost gone on her knees to beg me to come, and offered wages to tempt any poor Christian girl to forget what was due to her respectable soul. And if it hadn't been for them as takes an interest in you, too, and is the most generous and truest gentleman as ever walked, and he doesn't live so far from here neither; nothing would have induced me to stay in the house of murderers. For they do say that Mr. and Mrs. Anson murdered one or two people before they came here from those unbeknown outlandish parts, and that she's no better than she should be, and that's why no one comes to see them; and there is murder going on now, for I heard Mrs. Anson herself accuse Mr. Anson and Mr. Hesketh the other night in one of her tantrums, which is no wonder she has such a wicked, awful child as that Miss Dolores, whose tempers and whims is indulged till no good Christian, let alone a dog, could live with her; and if you will be advised, you will go as the others did when they was warned, and not stay to be murdered in

your bed, and find out too late that your character is gone, and no lady will employ you as a governess again; and, if you are wise, you will go at once. The Grey Boy has begun to walk again, and when he does, it always means harm to them as lives in this wicked house, with passages and rooms enough to give you the creeps. He was seen the day you came, and there was near a bad accident on the line, and Mr. Hesketh was in the train, and it was the Grey Boy as did it, to kill him. And you might have been killed, too, and if the Grey Boy didn't put the sleeper on the line, he put it into the head of some one else to do it, so that Mr. Hesketh should come to harm, and there'll be death yet in the house now he has begun to walk. I wouldn't sleep another night with such a wicked lot for the biggest wages in the country."

Lella flung the letter in the fire. But she did not go to bed that night. She sat over her bedroom fire, placing her chair so that she could face the door of the room, which, though she locked it securely inside at night, could be found open a few hours later. She lighted all the candles in the room, and piled up the fire, sitting there nearly all night, dozing off at times to wake in a panic of expectation and terror. Nor until the night had passed once more into the morning hours of the returning day did she lie down to rest.

When she came down on Christmas morning, ready dressed for her walk, she saw Hesketh Anson in the hall. He was at the foot of the staircase, and he waited there until she descended, a sober-clad, slender figure, with the winter sunlight shining through the window on the staircase upon her, and catching the beautiful shades in her hair. It was dressed differently, to suit the fastidious taste of Dolores, and the alteration was wonderfully becoming to her. The young man's face as he looked up at her seemed to take a more set expression. Then his eyes fell on the book in her hand.

"You are going to church!" he exclaimed, with a quick contraction of his brow. "It is impossible to walk so far in such weather!" and he turned away to send a message to the stables. But she ran after him.

"It will be no use, Mr. Anson," she said breathlessly, "I am going to walk!"

Her eyes were full of her dislike of him.

"Very well," he said, with a short laugh. "If you don't come back, we will

organise a search for you in the snow-drifts. I would not keep you from church for the world. Especially to-day, when Christian folk meet to sing of good-will to each other. You will find plenty where you are going."

She did not answer the sneer.

It was a longer walk and more fatiguing than she expected. Service had begun when she reached the church.

There was a young man in the pew into which the vergers showed her, and looking up, Leila met the smiling eyes of Dr. Burton. She flushed crimson, and with a faint, shy smile in return, she averted her eyes, and for the rest of the service did not glance again in his direction.

The moment the service was over she rose to hurry out before the rest of the congregation. But she had not gone far when she was overtaken by Dr. Burton. With a courteous apology he addressed her, and under the strange circumstances of her life at Moorlands, and with the recollection of the pitying interest in his eyes when he learned that day at the station that she was going there, it scarcely seemed surprising or impertinent his doing so. At least, she accepted simply the renewal of that brief travelling acquaintanceship.

He walked on by her side, noticing, as he offered her the good wishes of the season, how much, in some ways, her appearance had improved. Her eyes were brighter, her colouring prettier and less delicate.

"You are happy there?" he asked abruptly. "Forgive me, I forgot for a moment I was a stranger," as he saw the distressed look that crossed her face. "Only——" he waited as if expecting her to speak. But she did not, and after a second he changed the topic.

"How did you get here? Surely they did not let you walk?" in a tone of disgust.

She quickly explained that it was her own wish. He glanced at her; something a little baffled veiled his eyes for a second. Her quick, shy look of pleased surprise on seeing him had been so pretty, she had so simply and frankly accepted the renewal of what had been, after all, but the merest scrap of an acquaintanceship, and yet it seemed as if some invisible barrier stood between him and a possibility of more confidential relation between them.

"Miss Mallet!" he exclaimed more directly, "what on earth persuaded your people to let you go to such a house as that? They couldn't have known what

sort of place it was!" indignantly. "Have not you heard?"

Her face told him that she had done so.

"But it isn't true!" she exclaimed. It was a question.

"I don't know how much is true, or not," he said. "I only know that not a soul ever darkens their doors, or exchanges a word with them. That they came a few years ago, from—no one knows where—bringing those black servants with them, and they have never been able to keep a white one. They seem to know no one. When they first came—at the very beginning, people thought of calling—but one day some man came into the neighbourhood who had apparently known them abroad—I believe they came from South America—and he hinted at such a black past too dark for you to hear, that every one avoided them, and so they have lived ever since."

"What—could the man only hint at such things!" disdainfully thinking of the spiteful anonymous letter.

"They did not deny it, anyway!" he said. "And"—he glanced down at her, as they walked down the wintry lane—"have you noticed nothing strange? One lady who was there like yourself told me that Mrs. Anson had the wickedest eyes she had ever seen, and that every one in the house seemed always afraid—Ah! you have noticed it too," the quick, searching sight of his professional training reading her face like a book.

"But it is nonsense!" she exclaimed. "It is all fancy. Of course there are no ghosts," and she laughed, but the sound was forced, and did not deceive the doctor.

The next question on his lips was suddenly silenced.

They had just turned out into the high-road from the bye-lane. Carriages and pedestrians coming from the church were passing along the road. A dog-cart, coming from the opposite direction, drew up before them. Hesketh Anson was driving it. He took no notice of Dr. Burton.

"I am glad I have not missed you, Miss Mallet," he said. He had come to fetch her, and Leila's face was full of defiant annoyance. The young doctor saw it.

"Perhaps Miss Mallet would rather walk," he said quietly. "And I shall be most pleased to act as her escort."

The appearance of Hesketh Anson on the scene had already excited the attention of the passers-by. One or two village boys actually stopped a few yards away to stare,

and even the county people as they drove up in their carriages, turned quickly to look at the little group in the road: the doctor, the young girl who was a stranger to them all, and Hesketh Anson of Moorlands.

"It is too far for Miss Mallet to walk back," said Hesketh Anson. "And it is beginning to snow again. I think you had better drive," addressing her with a different note in his voice.

The doctor began a quick remonstrance. But Leila's action checked him.

Her woman's sense of the fitness of things came to her rescue. Dr. Burton was a complete stranger to her, and after all, living, as she was, under the Ansons' roof, it was Hesketh Anson who should escort her home, and she declined the doctor's offer. He bit his lip; but he made no further objection.

The drive was a perfectly silent one. She never forgot it to the end of her days. The white expanse of country on either side, the scattered falling flakes of snow, which fluttered cold and gently against her face, the silent companion by her side, the stress and misery of the doubts

that rent her, a pale and silent herself, she sat there, striving to decide what she should do—the very first time in her short, inexperienced life that she had been called to make a crucial choice, unadvised, unaided.

Hesketh Anson broke the silence as they approached Moorlands.

"Are you going to stay?"

She had come to a conclusion, whether right or wrong, she was not wise enough yet to know. But she had decided, thinking of her aunt and Dolores.

"Yes," she said quietly.

"I am sorry for you," he said, after a slight pause, "but it is better for Dolores. Miss Mallet," he spoke again, "might I give you a word of advice? That fellow Burton isn't worth your notice. He'd sell his soul for a decently round sum."

She flashed a look of contempt at him. He was afraid of Dr. Burton, and vented his fear in malicious spite.

He caught the expression, and he said no more, but had she not been so certain in her judgement of him, she might have noticed the drawn look of dogged suffering that touched his face.

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